

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, July 24, 2015**

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July 31: Signed off [end-of-year](#) reports due  
July 31: Title IX information, extended deadline (see [below](#))

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## Notes from Acting Commissioner Abbott

### 1. RIDE, LEAs preparing for coming school year; update on calendar, social media

As we approach the mid-point of the summer, I hope you have taken some time to enjoy the season and to share some time with family and friends. Of course, we're all in the process of preparing for the coming school year as well. Here at RIDE, we're getting ready to welcome and to work with our new Education Commissioner, Ken Wagner. Ken is at present in New York and in the process of moving to Providence. He has been in close contact with many of us on the RIDE team and he is very much looking forward to joining us on August 3 and to meeting with many Rhode Island educators, families, and students.

Earlier this week we posted on our website the **2015-16 School Calendar**, and we can see from the listing that many school districts and charter public schools will start classes a month from now or sooner. We can also see that a number of you have shortened or even foregone the traditional winter recess, which should alleviate scheduling problems if we face another severe winter.

Finally, I want to let you know that, with the imminent arrival of our new Commissioner, we have established new **social media sites** for RIDE, which we will use to keep you and all friends of education informed about issues, topics, and events at RIDE and elsewhere. Here are links to follow us on Twitter and to "like" us on Facebook:



## **From RIDE**

### ***Assessments:***

#### **2. PARCC webinar cancelled**

As noted in Tuesday's Field Memo alert, RIDE has cancelled the webinar that we had scheduled for August 5 to prepare LEA and school administrators for the impending release of the PARCC results this fall. We will reschedule the webinar at a later date, and we will keep you informed about the rescheduling through the weekly Field Memo.

### ***Legal:***

#### **3. Order issued regarding student residency**

Following a Commissioner's hearing, Acting Commissioner Abbott has issued an order for the disenrollment of students (siblings) from North Kingstown and consequent enrollment in Warwick:

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2015/006-15\\_Residency\\_of\\_WW\\_and\\_AW\\_Doe\\_071615.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2015/006-15_Residency_of_WW_and_AW_Doe_071615.pdf).

#### **4. *Reminder:* RIDE collecting names, contact information for Title IX coordinators – *Action Item***

As a reminder, RIDE is compiling a current listing of all Title IX coordinators in our LEAs. Accordingly, we are asking that you (or your principals) provide the names and contact information for those individuals serving as Title IX coordinators within your district. The information will be compiled and posted on the RIDE website; also, we are asking that, for updating purposes, you notify the Legal Office of changes as they arise. The responses are now overdue; if you have not yet done so, please forward the requested information and any updates to Vilma DiOrio, at [vilma.diorio@ride.ri.gov](mailto:vilma.diorio@ride.ri.gov), by the close of business on **July 31** at the latest. Your cooperation is appreciated.

## From the U.S. Department of Education

### 5. U.S. Department of Education releases Parent Checklist

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education Press Office:

As America's 54-million students prepare to return to school this fall, the U.S. Department of Education, [America Achieves](#), [National Council of La Raza \(NCLR\)](#), [National PTA](#), and the [United Negro College Fund \(UNCF\)](#) have released a [parent checklist](#) with questions and resources that parents and caregivers can use to help ensure their children are getting the education they deserve. The checklist suggests key questions, tips for educational success, and resources for more information.

"I have never met a parent who doesn't want the best for their child. However, it can be hard for families to know how to support their child's education. Engaging with their educators is a good place to start. This tool provides families with questions to ask to work with educators to ensure schools are providing all students with an education that will prepare them for college and careers," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

The checklist follows the [set of rights](#) that the U.S. Department of Education [recently released](#) outlining what families should be able to expect for their children's education. The rights follow the educational journey of a student—from access to quality preschool; to engagement in safe, well-resourced elementary and secondary schools that hold all students to high standards; to access to an affordable, quality college degree.

The checklist and the set of rights build on the U.S. Education Department's work to reach out to parents—from the [Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#), to [tools that can help families and students select the best colleges for their needs](#), to support of Parent Training and Information Centers and Resource Centers.

"It is imperative that all children have a safe, healthy, supportive, and well-resourced school in which to thrive and

learn. And to help ensure a world-class education is provided to every child, it is essential that our education systems are transparent, families are engaged and at the table, and families and educators work together to support student success,” said Laura Bay, president of National PTA. “National PTA is pleased to collaborate with the Department of Education, America Achieves, National Council of La Raza, and the United Negro College Fund to bring the checklist to families nationwide to empower them with questions, tips, and resources to make sure their children are getting a high-quality education that enables them to reach their full potential.”

The [checklist](#) suggests these “key questions” that parents should pose to their child’s educators:

*Quality: Is my child getting a great education?*

- How will you keep me informed about how my child is doing on a regular basis? How can we work together if my child falls behind?
- Is my child on grade level, and on track to be ready for college and a career? How do I know?

*Ready for Success: Will my child be prepared to succeed in whatever comes next?*

- How will you measure my child’s progress and ability in subjects including reading, math, science, the arts, social and emotional development, and other activities?
- How much time will my child spend preparing for and taking state and district tests? How will my child’s teacher and I know how to use the results to help my child make progress?

*Safe and Healthy: Is my child safe and cared for at school?*

- What programs are in place to ensure that the school is a safe, nurturing and positive environment? What are the discipline and bullying policies at the school?

- Are the meals and snacks provided healthy? How much time is there for recess and/or exercise?

*Great Teachers: Is my child engaged and learning every day?*

- How do I know my child's teachers are effective?
- How much time do teachers get to collaborate with one another?
- What kind of professional development is available to teachers here?

*Equity and Fairness: Does my child, and every child at my child's school or program, have the opportunity to succeed and be treated fairly?*

- How does the school make sure that all students are treated fairly? (For example, are there any differences in suspension/expulsion rates by race or gender?)
- Does the school offer all students access to the classes they need to prepare them for success, including English language learners and students with special needs (for example, Algebra I and II, gifted and talented classes, science labs, AP or IB classes, art, music)?

The reference guide also includes some ways teachers suggest parents can support their children's success in school. For example:

- Set high expectations for your child.
- Make sure your child is in school every day and on time. Attendance matters.
- Work collaboratively with your child's teachers and talk to them about goals and expectations for your child.
- Talk to your child each day about what he or she is doing in school and discuss what he or she learned.
- Encourage your child to complete assignments, and see that she or he finishes them.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences.

- Participate in family engagement and volunteer opportunities.

Lastly, the checklist suggests next steps for families to take if their child is not getting a strong education and resources for more information. Among the sites on line are: [age-appropriate guides](#) to supplement this reference guide; [information on how your school compares](#) to other schools; [school-based parent organizations](#); [bullying prevention](#); [nutrition](#); [disability issues](#); [limited-English challenges](#); [early childhood learning](#); and [homelessness](#).

## **6. Secretary Duncan issues statement on ESEA reauthorization**

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

Earlier this month, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate each passed its own *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) reauthorization bill. In the coming weeks, House and Senate designees will meet in conference committee to negotiate a compromise bill. Secretary Duncan issued a [statement](#) on the Senate bill, and the U.S. Department of Education released an [infographic](#) on progress under ESEA and work remaining.

“We applaud the progress made in the Senate today toward replacing the flawed *No Child Left Behind Act*,” the Secretary noted. “We need a new law that gives every child an opportunity to succeed. This bill would give states more flexibility from one-size-fits-all federal mandates and reduce the burden of testing on classroom time while still ensuring that parents and educators know how students are doing every year. I’m particularly pleased that the bill would expand access to high-quality preschool and direct taxpayer dollars toward proven innovative strategies. I commend the hard work of Chairman [Lamar] Alexander, Senator [Patty] Murray, and their colleagues to get us this far.

“However, this bill still falls short of truly giving every child a fair shot at success by failing to ensure that parents and children can count on local leaders to take action when students are struggling to learn. We need to identify which schools work and which ones don’t so we can guarantee every child will have the education they need. We can’t tolerate continued indifference to the lowest-performing schools, achievement gaps that let some students fall behind, or high schools where huge numbers of students never make it to graduation. This bill should also do more to maintain focus on what matters most – whether students are actually learning and graduating and whether those who need the greatest help receive the resources and support they need. I look forward to working with Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, Chairman [John] Kline, and Representative [Bobby] Scott – as well as their colleagues – to strengthen the final bill before it reaches the President’s desk.”

The Secretary’s brief statement on the House bill is available [here](#).

## **7. U.S. Departments of Education, Justice provide information, guidance on discipline, school climate**

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

Earlier this week, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice hosted teams of superintendents, principals, and teachers from across the country for “[Rethink Discipline](#),” a day-long conference at the White House on creating positive school climates and implementing effective discipline practices. The conference was designed to advance the national conversation about reducing unnecessary out-of-school suspensions and expulsions and replacing these practices with positive alternatives that keep students in school and engaged in learning.

According to data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), more than three-million students are suspended or expelled every year. At the event, the agencies released new maps,



based on the CRDC data, illustrating out-of-school suspensions to help educators and communities understand the extent of this practice. The maps clearly demonstrate how Southeastern districts have the highest rates of out-of-school suspensions in the nation and students with disabilities are widely and frequently suspended. See:

- percent of students who have received one or more out-of-school suspensions by district – [map](#) and [data table](#); and
- percent of students with disabilities who have received one or more out-of-school suspensions by district – [map](#) and [data table](#).

The agencies also shared new resources to assist school leaders in their efforts:

- “[Addressing the Root Causes of Disciplinary Disparities: An Educator’s Action Planning Guide](#)”; and
- “[Rethink School Discipline: Resource Guide for Superintendent Action](#).”

On Monday, the Justice Department is launching the National Resource Center for School Justice Partnerships, which will serve as a training and technical assistance portal for juvenile courts, schools, law-enforcement agencies, and others to support reform efforts at the local level. And, in the coming weeks and months, the U.S. Department of Education will use social-media events, blogs, and other approaches to engage the field about new tools and resources to help communities. For more information about the Administration’s work on school climate and discipline, visit the Rethinking Discipline [web site](#).

### **From other organizations**

#### **8. Resources available to help parents, families enrich children’s language experiences**

The nonprofit organization Too Small to Fail has put together a useful set of resources, in English and Spanish, for parents, families, health-care professionals, and community providers who are working to enrich children's early language experiences. These "Talk, Read, Sing Together Tip Sheets" are part of the Talk Read Sing initiative. The information is available here:

<http://toosmall.org/community/resources>

Please feel free to share this information with your community.

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/FieldMemos.aspx>